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Bishara al-Khouri, became President with the pan-Arab Riyad as-Sulh as Prime Minister; these nationalists were not satisfied with mere titular sovereignty but claimed the reality of independence, and in November 1943 a Free French resort to force against them was reversed only by a British intervention, endorsed by the United States Government. The Free French were thus constrained to transfer most branches of the administration to the Syrian and Lebanese Parliaments, but retained control of the local 'Troupes Spéciales' and obstructed the proper equipping of the Syrian gendarmerie. The French intention was to make this vital concession of authority conditional upon the conclusion of a Franco-Syrian treaty which would give France much the same strategic, economic, and cultural advantages as Britain had retained in Iraq by the already obsolescent Treaty of 1930. In March 1945 Syria and Lebanon had been admitted as sovereign states to membership both of the United Nations and of the League of Arab States. The Syrian nationalists were not prepared to subordinate their sovereignty to an imposed alliance with France, and the landing of a contingent of Senegalese troops immediately after VE-day (in disregard of a personal appeal of Churchill to de Gaulle) was regarded in both Syria and Lebanon as clear evidence of a French resort to coercion. Sporadic outbreaks of violence between the Syrian gendarmerie and the local nationalists on the one hand and the French garrison on the other became general, and when, at the end of May 1945, the local French Commander carried out a bombardment of Damascus the British Government ordered their Commander-in-Chief, Middle East, to intervene, by force if necessary, to restore order in a region whose security was vital for British communications in the still-continuing war in the Far East. The crisis accelerated the complete withdrawal of all foreign troops, concerning which the demands of the Syrian and Lebanese Governments were supported by the Security Council; the process was completed in Syria by 15 April 1946 and in Lebanon by the end of the year.

Between the wars, the French Mandate had allowed political development in Lebanon to produce at least a façade of parliamentary democracy, with arrangements between the Muslim and Christian leaders on the division of political power and prerogatives, and the active commercial and intellectual life of Lebanon made progress with a minimum of government interference. In Syria, however, local separatisms which French policy had encouraged made it very difficult for any Syrian Government to knit the people together from Damascus; the